The Microsociology of the Theater Performance

An Inquiry About Interaction Rituals and Flow Experience on Stage During a Physically Distanced Theater Performance

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Master Thesis

June 2021

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing academic interest in the effect of the lack of physical co-presence amongst an audience in cultural experiences, much uncertainty still exists about interaction rituals amongst performers in cultural experiences where the audience is expected to be more passive. This qualitative microsociological research aims to answer the question: How are interaction rituals and the flow experience of theater performers influenced by physical distancing measures? Twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with theater performers who have performed during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study focuses on the experience of theater performers in different situations, amongst which traditional end stage theater, theater-in-the-round, site-specific theater, live stream theater and cyberart theater. A better understanding of interaction rituals on a theater stage was established by analyzing the similarities and meaningful dissimilarities of their experiences and how they deal differently with a corresponding challenge.

Overall, this study has revealed that the physical distancing measures have a significant influence on theater performances. They affect the occurrence of the flow experience and favor a personal approach towards the audience over a collective approach. The research has shown that because of the recent change in generalized culture, the ritual practice of the theater performance is actively adjusted in order to be successful.

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice. For traditional fourth wall theater productions, the audience is best seen as an outsider, and if the performers are able to focus on their inter-acting on stage, they can still have successful interaction rituals amongst each other. Flat-floored theater-in-the-round seems most favorable in this new situation. The audience is addressed directly and the audience can be approached as individuals on the first row. Additionally recording a traditional end-stage theater performance is like a poorly executed movie. Performances need to be designed specifically for the medium which makes them more visual and technical.

KEYWORDS: Theater Performance, Flow Experience, Interaction Rituals, Microsociology, Cultural Experience

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This master thesis and the research behind it would not have been possible without the help and guidance from my supervisor, Michaël Berghman. His critical but constructive and uplifting feedback has kept me on track from the start of the process. I am most thankful for the constant inspiring communication with a fellow student. Throughout the process, Kimmy Colombo has been a sparring partner and motivation. It is with true pleasure that I acknowledge that the language of the paper has benefited enormously from the advice of my sister Renée Vermeeren. Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for their support throughout reaching this academic milestone.

1. Introduction

> "Sometimes they laugh really hard, other times they giggle a bit and in the worst case they don't laugh at all, and then you also know that you have to take it up a step. You don't get that with a camera. With an online performance, you have no return whatsoever."
> - Respondent 6, live stream theater

On March 12 in 2020, theaters were forced to shut down due to the restrictions by the government to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. Society craved cultural engagement, however, and thankfully, the theaters could briefly open during the summer months. Now, the theaters were open once again, but there were still physical distancing measures in place which influenced the performances significantly. During this time, physical distancing and a lack of physical co-presence have become the norm in the cultural experience. But, as several theories claim, the theater performance — as with other cultural, religious and sports participation — serves as an experience in which a collective focus creates collective emotions, resulting in the production of meaning and solidarity in social groups (Benzecry & Collins, 2014; Collins, 2005; Cossu, 2010; Durkheim, 2001 [1912]; Vandenberg et al. 2020).

Social-psychological research suggests that promoting collectivism might have a positive outcome on reducing the spread of Covid-19 and related conspiracy theories (Biddlestone et al., 2020). In a time of social isolation and physical distancing, it seems ever more important to enjoy feelings of collective consciousness, solidarity and belonging. Physical co-presence and collective experience have been key ingredients of the analysis of microsociological processes in the cultural experience (Benzecry & Collins, 2014; Collins, 2005; Vandenberg et al., 2020). To date, only a limited number of studies on physical distancing in cultural participation have been identified. These studies were mainly concerned with situations where a lot of audience participation is generally expected, such as in music concerts and religious rituals (Baker et al., 2020; Parish, 2020; Vandenberg et al., 2020), concluding that although not all emotions were lost; the lack of bodily co-presence prevented collective effervescence from happening.

Much uncertainty still exists about the relationship between interaction rituals in cultural experiences where the audience is expected to be more passive. Vandenberg et al. (2020) notes that it might be interesting to research cultural experiences that requires a seated audience such as theater. Theater belongs to a genre of cultural participation in which the audience is often thought to be rather passive just like with opera. Benzecry and Collins

published *The High of Cultural Experience: Toward a Microsociology of Cultural Consumption* (2014), in which they revealed that although the opera audience seems rather passive, a lot of different processes between participants reveal different interaction rituals resulting in collective focus and individual emotional energy.

Theater performances lend themselves particularly well to the Durkheimian framework of commemorative rites. A theater performance is an aesthetic experience of acting together, reenacting experiences to reflect and adjust social organization (Cossu, 2010). The current Covid-19 pandemic has changed an operative structural condition of the theater performance, that is a physically distanced audience. Even though there has been some research into audience participation in situations similar to physical distancing, research into the effect this has on the actors is scarce, if not non-existent. An inquiry into the effect on the theater actors' experience of a physically distanced audience can provide new insights into the microsociological processes that produce individual emotional energy and feelings of collectivity in cultural experience as a whole. Therefore, this study will focus on the experience of the theater performer — the master of ceremony. During a theater performance, the interaction processes that make up cultural experience are made more explicit through aesthetic reflection on social organization (Cossu, 2010). Therefore, it is relevant to research how theater performers in different situations experienced interaction, facing a similar changed operative structural condition.

In addition to identifying whether interaction rituals take place and how they are affected by the different contexts of physical proximity, it is essential to determine why people feel drawn to these situations in the first place and whether the situations are experienced as rewarding for the performers and why. The flow experience refers to the experience in which someone is drawn into an activity completely, therefore shutting out consciousness about time or hunger and being challenged again and again at just the right level so that they have to improve themselves. Additionally, it means that the activity is in itself rewarding — the end goal is used as an excuse for going through the process — and in previous research, this psychological process has often been illuminated amongst artists specifically and in cultural experience (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). The current pandemic has changed a structural condition — physical co-presence — that is often described as a prerequisite for microsociological processes that result in the production of shared focus and social emotion in the cultural experience. This study aims to analyze how the change in physical proximity influences these microsociological processes and therefore focuses on the change in interaction rituals and the flow experience of theater performers on

stage. Interviewing theater performers and theater directors that have performed (and directed) within this different context of physical co-presence will reveal mainly what performers have to say about their experience during the performance. This is relevant information because it concerns exactly the factors that they paid attention to, that struck them, stayed with them; thus illuminating whatever they were focused on.

This study does not target one specific case study but explores a wide array of situations in which performers and theater directors have attempted to interact with an audience that was affected by physical distancing measures. Zooming in on the similarities amongst and meaningful differences of the experience of the performers rather than focusing on the different operative structural conditions themselves, will create an insight into bigger macro-structural symbols and structures. Therefore, this study will answer the following research question: How are interaction rituals and the flow experience of theater performers influenced by physical distancing measures?

In the next chapter, the theoretical dimensions of the research are laid out. After a brief introduction to the types of theater that will be analyzed in this study, the historical relationship between the sociological constructs of interaction rituals, the flow experience and theater will be analyzed, further emphasizing the relevance of this research. It will then go on to the justification of the methodological choices of qualitative semi-structured interviews with performers and theater directors who have performed and created theater performances during the Covid-19 pandemic and adhered to the physical distancing measures amongst the audience. Chapter four is concerned with the findings, focusing on the three key themes: (1) Sense of motivation, (2) impression management, and (3) entrainment, that were thematically analyzed based on the theoretical framework and the interviews; leading to the final section in which the concluding findings, limitations and practical and academic implications of the study will be presented.

2. Theoretical Framework

Theater is an umbrella term that encapsulates different forms of performing arts happening at a specific time and place, meaning that it disappears while it is being performed and it is secluded from the everyday experience of life. This study will analyze what performers acting in different forms of theater, despite striking differences, have in common and how they deal differently with a corresponding challenge. Five different forms of theater will be studied, specifically defined by the characteristics of the context of performer versus audience.

The first form is end-stage theater, meaning that the audience is seated at one side of the stage. This is the more traditional form of theater and takes place in spaces specifically designed for this purpose, such as theater halls. This is also the more traditional setting for performances that use a fourth wall concept, meaning that the stage is surrounded by three normal walls (the edges of the stage) and the fourth wall through which they pretend not to see the audience and the audience is facing them.

The second form of theater that will be studied is theater-in-the-round, meaning that the audience is seated around the stage. Within this form, there are some different choices that can be made, such as raising the stage as opposed to a flat-floored stage where the audience is seated at the same level as the performers; or having either one circle of audience around the stage or an arena in which each extra circle of audience members is seated higher than the previous one. This form of theater is not applicable to fourth wall theater plays and is often used for theater plays in which the audience is approached directly.

The third form of theater is site-specific theater, meaning that the site is specific for the theater performance. This is a location that was not designed specifically for a theater performance, in contrast with the previous two forms of theater. The location is either chosen on the basis of the show — such as a forest if this is conceptually relevant for the play — or the show is adapted to the location such as performances on schools, companies or even city tour shows.

The fourth form of theater that will be discussed is live stream theater, which means that the performance is performed in front of a camera and streamed to either an audience that is somewhere else as a group (i.e. a classroom of students) or to an audience that is viewing the performance individually or as duo's, for example from their own living rooms. Within this form of theater, there are decisions to be made concerning if and when the performers can see the audience and whether the audience can see each other or not.

The final form of theater that will be part of the sample of this research is cyberart theater. Although the art world has been playing with the use of craftsmanship and technology since after the First World War — such as Bauhaus, Dada, Cubism, Futurism, Pop Art, etc. — the acceptance of technology as a means to contribute to aesthetic discourse has not yet fully sunken in (Giannachi, 2004). Cyberart aims to have the viewer participate in more than only meaning-making, therefore, leading to collective creation: "Thus creation is no longer limited to the moment of conception or realisation; the virtual system provides a machine for generating events" (Giannachi, 2004, p. 4). Without falling into the epistemological pit that is Marschall McLuhan's theories on remediation and his famous saying 'the medium is the message' (McLuhan et al., 1967), it should be said that although theater is already a multimedia form of art (e.g: singing, dancing, staging, literature, light, scenography, etc.) the remediation through virtuality is relevant especially because theater, at the core, plays with creating a shared reality at a specific time and space.

Theories that are often used and built upon in research concerning theater such as, amongst others, phenomenology, post-structuralism, deconstruction, feminist and gender theory, reader-response and reception theory, and post-colonial theory are often described as literary theories because a large part of these theories place language at the core of humanity and they often seem appropriated by the literary scholars (Fortier, 2016). This study will instead take a sociological perspective on the experience of theater performers to gain insight into the effect of physical distancing in cultural experience and the effect on microsociological processes generating flow experience and interaction rituals.

To establish a theoretical framework, it is important to understand the philosophical pillars on which the following literature is built. On stage, a shared reality is played out which is an aesthetic experience of the past and/or social organization. The symbolic interactions that occur on stage connect the performer to society and reflect society in return. In the following, symbolic interactionism is analyzed and the relevance for this study is made explicit.

2.1 The Self and Symbolic Interactionism

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) can be categorized under the classical American pragmatist philosophers and became very influential in sociology and the social sciences. One influential work was published postmortem by his students, *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* in 1934 based on his school of thought and his lectures. Inspired by Hegel and William James, Mead believed that the self is inherently

social and cognitive. Mead's perspective on the development of the self was inspired by classical psychological perspectives such as egocentrism. According to Mead, the self is constructed through a dialectic relationship of the 'I' and the 'Me'. The 'Me' is the socialized part of the self that a person is not born with. It is a temporal bundle of attitudes of individuals in a social group towards the individual ('if I cry in the classroom my classmates will think I am immature'). The 'I' is the active part of the self ('I who acted'). The 'I' responds to the self but this is only understandable to the self in the past or future. The generalized other is the understanding of general systematic patterns of a social group that is most easily visualized by thinking of a team sport. A player needs to know all the different roles in a team and how to behave according to the rules.

This theoretical construct illuminates the micro-scale research field of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism focuses on small-scale interactions to get an understanding of society as a whole. Herbert Blumer (1900-1987) explains in his influential work *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (1986) that this methodological approach is based on three fundamental premises: (1) "[T]hat human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings which these things have for them" (Blumer, 1986, p. 2), the meaning of a thing (symbol) is central in individuals' perception and thus the actions that they take. (2) As opposed to psychological schools of thought such as realism, the meaning of a thing is not defined by any qualities of the thing or the build-up of different psychological processes within an individual. Instead, symbolic interactionism "[…] sees meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people" (Blumer, 1986, p. 4), thus the meaning of a thing can be different to different (groups of) people. (3) The last premise is that "symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact" (Blumer, 1986, p. 5). An individual encountering an object will enter a process of interpretation — rather than "automatic application of established meanings" (Blumer, 1986, p. 5) — that begins with first remembering and regrouping past understandings of the meaning of a thing and this should be seen as an interaction between the 'Me' and the 'I' — an internalized social process rather than an interplay of psychological elements. Therefore, in order to understand a concept such as a theater performance — the meaning of a thing is a fluid social product — underlying social constructs need to be illuminated since they cannot simply be observed.

2.2 Collective Effervescence

Emile Durkheim (1858-1918) writes his last book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) at a time when it is more common for sociologists to research the relationship between social structures and religion. I.e. Max Weber publishes empirical research that illuminates social and economic structures within capitalism that are remnants of Calvinism in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). Even though at the time secular ethicists failed to see the relevance of religious rituals in society and believed that science would overtake the place of religion in society, Durkheim claimes that religion and science share the same (cognitive) purpose of classifying and categorizing the understanding of the world we observe around us (Durkheim, 2001 [1912]). Durkheims' theory on rituals describes rituals as interactions; more often described as "acting together" (Cossu, 2010, p. 36), set in a particular time in a separate place (Bell, 1992; Bellah, 2005; Cossu, 2010).

In contemporary science, it is a common consensus that Durkheim's theory applies to more than religious rituals in societies; collective effervescence is used as a theoretical tool for other fields of study such as event studies (Marques et al., 2021). theater especially fits the Durkheimian framework of commemorative rites — through "the social organization of time and memory, and the reenactment of the past as a source of aesthetic life" (Cossu, 2010, p. 33). During a theater performance, there is a temporary shared reality in which shared meanings in society (or a social group) such as history, norms, values and emotions are revisited.

According to Durkheim, a way to generate feelings of solidarity and collectivism in society is through collective effervescence. This occurs when people come together outside of the profane (mundane) and perform a sacred (extraordinary) ritual — such as going to a theater that is built for 'a night out'. How people are coming together and experience some sort of exaltation creates feelings of closeness and unity. In Durkheim's own words: "Their proximity generates a kind of electricity that quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation" (Durkheim, 2001 [1912], p. 162). On the prerequisite that there is physical co-presence, Durkheim suggests two things are needed to reach collective effervescence: (1) shared action and awareness, and (2) shared emotion. Collective effervescence also has long-lasting results such as group solidarity, the same understanding of symbols and/or sacred objects and individual emotional energy (Collins, 2005).

2.3 Sociology of the Everyday

Using the previously described symbolic interactionist perspective, Erving Goffman (1922-1982) developed the so-called dramaturgical perspective in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), offering analytical tools for microsociological interpretation of interactions. By describing everyday interactions as ritualistic practices that maintain social order, Goffman shows how interaction is influenced by situational activities and personal attributions such as personality, emotions and cognition.

Using theatrical terminology, Goffman illuminates a world in which individual and group behavior is dependent on who someone is with and where someone is situated. While Durkheim reveals that the purpose of commemorative rites encompasses the production of feelings of solidarity and a mutual understanding of symbols, Goffman shows that this ritualistic practice is not restricted to commemorative rites but is seen in everyday interaction.

Goffman uses theatrical terminology to describe the meaning of interactional behavior in everyday situations. It is very suitable because in theater and on stage, the ritualistic practice of maintaining a shared reality is made more explicit. The dramaturgical perspective is not about theater per se, but it is very useful for understanding what is happening in theater. The theory would also be appropriate without this very suitable terminology.

First, it is important to note that for Goffman, all individuals in a situation are both the actors and the audience — demonstrating the importance of an audience in theater performances. The frontstage refers to a situation in which an individual 'knows' people are watching. The behavior is either intentionally purposeful or follows a routine that confirms internalized norms and (group) identity. The knowledge of being watched is shaping the behavior. The backstage is a space where an individual's guard can be (partially) let down. This is also a space where ritualistic practices that will happen on the frontstage are rehearsed and determined. However, the backstage is often shared with teammates for a specific performance, so one would not let their guard down completely because one individual is part of multiple teams or theater productions. Additionally to this distinction, Goffman describes the outside which refers to places and people that are not part of the performance of the ritualistic interaction intended to maintain a shared reality of that specific social group. People who enter a frontstage from the outside whilst a ritualistic interaction is being performed, are often seen as intruders because of the possibility of them 'ruining' the performance. People that come to a theater late are a risk because they can distract the performers or they will have missed something important that the other people in the audience have come to understand throughout the performance — therefore not being able to

maintain the shared reality. To apply this literally to theater, when audience members suddenly shout out to the people on stage, loud noise cannot be ignored by performers because it will 'break' the agreement of the temporary reality on stage and the audience being there with them. If the audience is distracted by something, the performers must acknowledge the noise as well.

Impression management describes intended behavior and patterns by both the performers and the audience that is necessary for any social situation — real or imaginary — to fulfill a personal goal. As opposed to the personal motive of impression management, Goffman also elaborates on the expressive order (Goffman, 1955), which illuminates the need to save face (staying in character) of all individuals in a situation to prevent embarrassment. Goffman explains that every social interaction is maintaining the meaning of different symbols within that social situation and everybody has the primary obligation to validate or at least maintain these meanings. By respecting this expressive order, social status is gained; the individual is trustworthy and indeed part of the social group. The performance must be maintained together. For example, sometimes a performer might forget their lines during a performance and fall out of character. This often feels a little embarrassing, even for the people in the audience. However, usually, the audience doesn't get up and leave, they will wait quietly until the actor proceeds their role — and often act as if it didn't happen or as if they hadn't noticed. Sometimes it can even be a little endearing if the actor falls out of character through, for example, laughing at their own joke, this can even strengthen the bond between the audience and the performer. However, this depends on the shared understanding of symbols. If it is a serious (part of the) play in which the fourth wall is very dominant, people will probably not find it funny or endearing if the actor falls out of character, yet if it is a very funny play in which the fourth wall is already very transparent, the audience might find it endearing because the performer is laughing with them — acknowledging them. The specific behavior influences interactions and by analyzing them, they can reveal the meaning of symbols in that specific social situation.

2.4 Interaction Ritual Chains

In the previous sections it was established that performers on stage take part in certain interactions through which intended behavior is acted out to maintain a shared reality. In the following, a perspective towards why people take part in these interactions is formed.

Randall Collins (1941) writes *Interaction Ritual Chains* in 2005. In which he claims that interaction rituals (IRs) are intense social experiences that create emotional energy that

drives individuals from and towards situations. In a study of opera audiences and fanatics — another form of cultural participation that is deemed rather passive as is theater — he describes, inspired by Durkheim: "It begins with the ingredients of bodily co-presence, mutually aware focus of attention, shared emotional quality, and exclusion of outside distractions" (Benzecry & Collins, 2014, p. 310). This can lead to a successful IR in which individuals are absorbed by their collective focus and get emotionally entrained. Resulting in a social emotion that Durkheim coined as collective effervescence.

Collins claims that collective movement of a social group — such as an audience — is a sign of solidarity, because the reason that the movements of different individuals in a situation can be synchronized means they have fallen into the same rhythm. This is an unconscious process because people are unable to think about and copy movements at such a pace. The collective movement in an audience is a resonance that signals solidarity. This is both an internal and an external process that results in: "[F]eelings of solidarity, respect for collective symbols, and the emotional energy of confidence, enthusiasm, and proactive motivation (Benzecry & Collins, 2014, p. 311).

Additionally, Benzecry's and Collins' findings lead to a second order of IRs named Inner-Interaction Rituals (I-IR). In an I-IR, an individual turns their body into a resonance chamber. This does not merely mean that they let music resonate within their body or mind, it means that the social process of the IR is repeated in the individual's body (personal experience). The individual can have a social interaction within their-self. They are reminded of past experiences; they are having an internal dialogue. Benzecry and Collins compare it to solitary prayer. A person who is trying to reach the state of I-IR but is unsuccessful, is compared to a writer who is having writer's block. Benzecry and Collins demonstrate how individuals are drawn to social interaction by emotional energy generated by IRs and I-IRs, but they also explain that when the IRs or I-IRs fail, energy is drained and individuals can become very irritated. Although this sounds like a very solitary experience, this microsociological process needs social interaction to work. One of the quotes Benzecry and Collins used to describe this, is from one of their respondents: "[F]alling in love alone, although surrounded by others" (Benzecry & Collins, 2014, p. 311). In table 1, all the different ingredients and outcomes of the two different interaction rituals according to Benzecry and Collins are structured.

	Interaction Ritual	Inner-Interaction Ritual
Ingredients	- Bodily copresence - Mutually aware focus of attention - Shared emotional quality - Exclusion of outside distractions	- Bodily and sensory entrainment is maximized - Performances can become meaningful through comparison to accumulated knowledge - The body becomes a resonance chamber → Internal dialogue
Result when successful	- Feeling in close resonance with other participants - Caught up in your own and others' rhythm - Feelings of solidarity - Respect for (and the same understanding of) symbols - Emotional energy and confidence - Enthusiasm - proactive motivation	- A harmonious rhythm among different parts of the self resulting in: - Self-motivation and self-solidarity - Internal sources of pleasure - Being surrounded by internalized memories and standards created by previous experiences
Result when unsuccessful	- Different opinion on expected behavior and symbols - Feeling 'distanced' from other audience members - Drains energy - Feeling irritated	- Cannot get into the flow of internal conversation - Keeps getting disturbed by external 'noise' - Wandering mental attention - Drains energy - Feeling irritated

Table 1: Defining characteristics of successful and unsuccessful IR and I-IR according to Benzecry and Collins (2014)

In *On the Microfoundations of Macrosociology*, Collins (1981) explains how the build-up of micro-events can be used to provide insight into macrosociological structures. He claims that major shifts in social structures can be attributed to microsociological changes; i.e. developments within generalized culture due to new forms of media of communication and novel cultural productions (Collins, 1981). IR theory takes a situation as a starting point rather than the individual itself. Personalities are shaped through chains of events and remain fluid. The emotional energy and symbolism that is generated by the interaction rituals is what pulls and pushes people from one situation to another, thus shaping individual personalities and societal macrostructures. IRs are also shaped by operative structural conditions that are in

the long run shaping cultural repertoire. However, Collins does distinguish himself from Bourdieu's cultural capital theory by defining the transformative power of ritualistic transformation (Collins, 2005). Therefore, analyzing interaction on a microsociological level is relevant because it can illuminate rules and meanings of macrostructures that often seem fixed and static but are fluid.

Inspired by a structuralist conviction of socialization, Collins confirms that the individual is socialized from the outside, however, "IR theory is not a model of a wind-up doll, programmed early in life, which ever after walks through the pattern once laid down" (Collins, 2005, p. 68). Collins claims that individuals are always being socialized in every social situation and when a chain of situations is interrupted, the reminiscent energy and the (co-)creation of symbols (and therefore beliefs) fade away.

2.5 The Flow Experience

Additionally to the understanding of interactional behavior as maintaining social order in sociology and the production of social emotion and energy, the field of psychology developed the understanding of viewing individuals as proactive self-regulating organisms during the last three decades, resulting in research on the subjective experience (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). The flow theory is built on an interactionist framework. "Rather than focusing on the person, abstracted from context [...] flow research has emphasized the dynamic system composed of person and environment, as well as the phenomenology of person-environment interactions" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 241). Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi claim that "*a good life is one that is characterized by complete absorption in what one does*" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 239, original emphasis). The first time Csikszentmihalyi thought about what would later become the flow experience, is when he saw an artist get fully absorbed in their work. The flow experience refers to the experience in which someone is drawn into an activity completely and being challenged just the right amount so that they have to improve existing skills. It also means that the activity is in itself rewarding, not just the end product. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi define two conditions for the flow experience: (1) "Perceived challenges, or opportunities for action, that stretch (neither overmatching nor underutilizing) existing skills" and (2) "[c]lear proximal goals and immediate feedback about the progress that is being made" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 240), and six characteristics:

(1) Intense and focused concentration on what one is doing in the present moment;

(2) Merging of action and awareness;
(3) Loss of reflective self-consciousness (i.e., loss of awareness of oneself as a social actor);
(4) A sense that one can control one's actions; that is, a sense that one can in principle deal with the situation because one knows how to respond to whatever happens next;
(5) Distortion of temporal experience (typically, a sense that time has passed faster than normal);
(6) Experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding, such that often the end goal is just an excuse for the process (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 240).

An important term used within flow theory is *emergent motivation,* which is used to describe the flow experience as brought about in an open system in which both the individual and the environment are active. Building on the aforementioned framework constructed by Maed, James and Blumer, they define the 'I' and the 'Me' in their own words as: "(a) [T]he sum of one's conscious processes and (b) the information about oneself that enters awareness when one becomes the object of one's own attention" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 243) therefore defining the self as 'the knower' and 'the known' (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

From a psychological perspective: "What to pay attention to, how intensely and for how long, are choices that will determine the content of consciousness, and therefore the experiential information available to the organism" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 243). Thus the focus can be interpreted as a way of interacting with the environment or the situation because the information that enters the consciousness is what is focused on: "Only those items which I *notice* shape my mind''(Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 243, original emphasis). Additionally, the information that enters the consciousness is eventually what contributes to the 'Me' — the known — and therefore the self.

> Flow research and theory had their origin in a desire to understand this phenomenon of intrinsically motivated, or autotelic, activity: activity rewarding in and of itself (auto = self, telos = goal), quite apart from its end product or any extrinsic good that might result from the activity. (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 240)

Years of research illuminated that flow seems to be a universal phenomenon that is not limited by gender, age or ethnicity. However, Csikszentmihalyi does describe the autotelic

personality that encompasses certain metaskills that make them more likely to reach an intense flow experience. “These metaskills include a general curiosity and interest in life, persistence, and low self-centeredness, which result in the ability to be motivated by intrinsic rewards” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 245).

3. Methods

In the previous section, relevant theories touching on the research field have been analyzed and a theoretical framework was established. In the following section, methodological choices will be justified, ethical aspects of the study will be presented and attention will be paid to reflexivity.

3.1 Choice of Methods

This qualitative microsociological inquiry aims to analyze how IRs and flow experience of the performers are influenced by physical distancing measures during a theater performance. By exploring the situational behavior of theater performers on a microsociological level, this thesis aims to add to the understanding of bigger social structures such as cultural experience and the effects of physical distancing in social organization. Additionally to the exploratory nature of this study, the aim is to gain an understanding of underlying reasons and interactional processes; thus asking for a qualitative approach.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with respondents who have performed in different situations, which allowed the respondents to talk about whatever it was they were focused on. Additional attention was paid to construct the interview in such a way as to let the respondents use their own language and not steer them in a specific direction.

As aforementioned, the methodological analysis approach IR does presuppose that it is a fluid process in which individuals hop from one situation to the next and when a ritual chain is broken, the effect fades away. Therefore, it would be useful to try and have the interview in between situations — in this case, theater performances influenced by physical distancing measures. At the time of the data collection for this study (March-April 2021), theaters were closed in the Netherlands and Belgium. It would have been preferable to interview all the respondents shortly after a performance with another performance on the agenda (because the respondents would still be in the same atmosphere), unfortunately, this was not possible. However, the chain is not yet broken as the prospect of performing in the near future is still plagued by physical distancing measures and other forms of theater performance continue to emerge. Some of the respondents are still performing — through live streams and school performances — and others have performed some months ago with a physically distanced audience.

3.2 Data Collection & Ethics

The data collection for this research has been conducted solely online. Individual respondents were found through contacts within the performing arts and academia, email and social media platforms such as LinkedIn. The interviews were conducted through Zoom or Microsoft Teams. The criteria that were used to select individuals during this purposive sampling process were: (1) The respondent has performed or created theater performances during the physical distancing measures that were introduced because of the Covid-19 pandemic — and adhered to these measures. (2) The performance(s) can incorporate music but must not have music as its key component as the immersiveness of music is a field of study in its own right; which is touched upon in this research, yet not the specific field of research.

Because of the public status of the respondents and the very sheer amount of theater performances during the pandemic, the anonymity of the respondents cannot be ensured fully. The transcripts are anonymized, however, a reader could potentially find out who a respondent is because of the context of a performance that is described in this study, which could potentially reveal which theater show is being discussed. None of the respondents found this a problem when I explained this to them. They expressed that they are used to sharing their opinion in the public debate under their own name and that this is a very novel and socially relevant (especially concerning their sector) topic which they want to express themselves about. Before the interviews took place, they signed an informed privacy consent form in which this was explained thoroughly and at the beginning of each interview, this was repeated and the respondents agreed again on the audio recordings.

In this study, performers from both The Netherlands and Belgium were interviewed. The professional theater sector in The Netherlands and Belgium overlap considerably, which makes the difference irrelevant to this study. Actual cultural policy and the physical distancing measures were sometimes different in these countries, however, in reality, the executed form of theater is the same, especially considering the overlap in language and in artists — sometimes performances as a whole are identical when an artist or group tour through the Benelux-area. This purposive sampling strategy resulted in the following composition of respondents and forms of theater performed during the Covid-19 pandemic:

Respondent, Gender & Age	End Stage Theater	Theater-in-the-Round	Site-Specific Theater	Live Stream Theater	Cyberart Theater
R1 (27, Female)		✓			
R2 (67, Male)	✓				
R3 (37, Male)	✓		✓	✓	
R4 (33, Male)	✓				
R5 (47, Male)	✓	✓		✓	
R6 (50, Male)				✓	
R7 (40, Female)			✓		
R 8 (55, Female)			✓		
R9 (65, Female)	✓				
R10 (33, Male)	✓	✓			
R11 (29, Male)					✓
R12 (56, Male)	✓		✓	✓	

Table 2: Overview of respondents (age and gender) and what they have performed during the Covid-19 pandemic

3.3 Operationalization

The semi-structured interviews started with a short introduction to emphasize that the respondents are not 100% anonymous in this study because of their public status. I started with some general questions that concerned their experience with performing, i.e. whether they had experience performing without any audience — for example on television or screen adaptations — and how they experienced the transition from playing for full audiences to physically distanced audiences to theaters closing down completely. Specific attention was paid to how challenging they express this period was for them.

The interview that followed was divided into two separate sections. The first section focused on the experience of the performers themselves — and among performers — and the second section focused on their perceived connection with the audience members and how

they thought the audience experienced the interaction. Each of these sections had 9 guiding questions but the interviews were constructed more like a conversation. For the full topic guide, see Appendix A.

3.4 Methods of Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis is a commonly used form of analysis in qualitative research and offers great advantages such as flexibility and grouping meanings. This flexibility must be protected by demarcating the exact form of thematic analysis and the decisions made by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This study is built on a solid theoretical foundation and focuses on very specific questions about that theory, resulting in a data analysis that is guided by a specific theoretical construct in the mind of the researcher. Additionally, the epistemological and philosophical pillars of this study are interpreted as a cause to take a constructionist perspective. The theoretical framework established that meaning and experience are social products — resulting in a focus on specific sets of data rather than a rich description of all the data. Therefore, in this study, specific attention is paid to the latent meaning and interpretation of the data. "If we imagine our data three-dimensionally as an uneven blob of jelly […] the latent approach would seek to identify the features that gave it that particular form and meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). In this study, the meaning behind something is being researched.

These decisions made early on in the process, even before the data collection, resulted in a theoretical thematic analysis influencing the shaping of themes. An open mind towards new findings was maintained throughout the coding process to prevent a situation in which the analysis falls short — meaning that answers to specific questions (that were already based on the literature) eventually shaped the recurrent themes in the findings, meaning there was no analysis going on. The topic guide was not structured on the basis of the theory, which would risk steering the respondents in a certain direction. The topic guide was structured on the experience in specific situations; based on two 'perspectives': 'How did the performer experience the situation?', and 'how does the performer think the audience experienced the situation?'.

3.5 Analysis Procedures

How a researcher decides whether specific data extracts are relevant or not and how themes 'emerge', influence the results of the research. This means — especially in the form of

thematic analysis conducted in this study — that decisions throughout the coding process must be transparent, explicit and the researcher should be able to explain why certain decisions were made (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, in the following, the different steps of the coding process (see Braun & Clarke, 2006) will be described — accompanied by specific decisions made in that step of the process.

The first step taken in the coding process was getting familiar with the data by going through it multiple times. During this first — or even preparatory — stage, the decision was made to remove data extracts that were certainly irrelevant in light of the specific research question. This does not mean that everything that did not seem to specifically target the research question was removed, however, sections concerning information about the weather or specific financial descriptions were removed. During this process, all ideas that came to mind about the data in relation to the theoretical framework and the research question, were written down to draw on in later stages of the coding process.

The second step in the coding process was the initial coding. Keeping in mind the limited amount of time in which this study had to be conducted, the following steps were taken: Three of the interviews were chosen that seemed to have the most relevant data extracts. These interviews were coded and all the extracts were given the same amount of time and attention. During this stage, I searched for as many different codes as possible and translated every extract into the latent meaning. This was followed by going through all of the codes and conducting a first round of categorization. These three interviews were coded again, using the codes that were already established. During this process, the codes and categories were further refined and adjusted. After (re)coding these three interviews and an initial round of categorizing, all the other interviews were coded using mostly the same codes. However, whenever an extract seemed not to fit any of the codes priorly established, a new code was created.

The third step of the theoretical thematic analysis was finding themes. By schematically structuring the codes, I came up with 17 different categories that connected most of the initial codes. The fourth and fifth steps in the analysis procedures overlapped significantly. The fourth step was reviewing the themes and the fifth step was defining and naming themes. In the beginning, all the created categories were checked by going through all the linked data extracts and initial codes. This iterative process has been repeated several times to make the analysis as sharp as possible. This was followed by defining themes that are able to connect these categories with the theoretical framework. During this stage, there was a continuous focus on the relationship between the codes (and interpretation of these

codes) and the theory, resulting in a final thematic map of the data, enabling the writing process of the result section.

4. Results

By using thematic analysis, I was able to distinguish three main themes based on the theory and data collection: (1) Sense of motivation, (2) impression management, and (3) entrainment. The interviews were designed to leave much room for the respondents to talk about what they wanted to talk about, which proved to be profitable and challenging at the same time. It allowed the respondents to share information on what they found most relevant to their experience: "Only those items which I *notice* shape my mind''(Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 243, original emphasis). The 12 interviews showcased broadly different findings, ranging from a focus on financial worries, to feeling relieved that they no longer had to adhere to audience responses throughout a performance. Therefore, in the following, the three distinguished themes will be analyzed with a focus on similarities, meaningful dissimilarities and the meanings behind them.

4.1 Sense of Motivation

This section is dedicated to how the respondents expressed they are motivated to perform and how they experience rewards. The theory of flow experience claims that for a person to get fully absorbed in the production of their work, it is essential that they are being challenged to stretch existing skills, without underutilizing or overmatching them. The theoretical framework has identified that successful IRs and I-IRs move people from one situation to the next. Therefore, it is essential to know if and how respondents were facing challenges or saw opportunities and how this influenced their motivation before, during and after their performances in order to attribute meaning to their interactional behavior — thus making the situations the central focus point of this study rather than the respondents themselves.

Almost all of the respondents experienced the beginning of the first lockdown as being forced to (finally) take some rest. The life of a theater actor is often busy and fully scheduled. Some of them work periods of six days a week — including two performances on Sundays — and others perform at schools or companies which often means performing multiple times per day. Most of the respondents did therefore quite enjoy this time off in the beginning. This was less so for the performers who worried about their financial situation; the cancellation of performances led to a loss of income that was troubling for some.

The findings revealed different factors that have an influence on motivation to perform — which correspond with characteristics and prerequisites of the flow experience — such as perceived opportunities and challenges, immediate feedback, intrinsic rewards and feeling in control of a situation. In the following, it will be discussed how the results shine a

light on the theories of this study in view of experiences before, during and after the performance, in order to more fully understand the effect of the factors influencing motivation that pull and push performers from one situation to the next.

4.1.1 Before the Performance

Even though most of the respondents enjoyed some rest at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, by March 2021, most of the respondents expressed that they and the people around them are becoming despondent. Last year, there were multiple periods in which productions (re)started momentarily, which meant a period — mostly around 8 weeks — of rehearsal, of which the goal was to make it to a premiere and perform the play at least a predetermined amount of times. These periods of rehearsal were often disrupted by changing restrictions, which meant no reward or any ensured aim for the performers. For this reason, shows that were resumed were either monologues or productions with very few cast members — sometimes even starring family members.

The respondents that saw an opportunity in the challenge of having to come up with a format that would fit current (and hopefully future) physical distancing measures, were the respondents that were used to playing site-specific theater before the pandemic.

> The enthusiasm of the potential of a new, of this new medium, because suddenly a lot more was possible virtually, so you are no longer limited to your decor, studio and budget. With a much lower budget, you can go much more extreme in your visual choices, in your scenography, you can not only adjust your decor but you can also, figuratively speaking, adjust the eyes of your audience, you can put their eyes wherever you want, you can give them any lens you want. (Respondent 11, cyberart theater)

Multiple respondents expressed that through a new and digital form of theater, a wider audience was reached and new media usage brought along numerous new possibilities of adjusting the views of the audience and scenography at a lower cost — respondent 11 (cyberart theater) even expressed that the online rehearsals brought along more creativity. This led to the launch of different forms of theater such as theater-in-the-round (both as an arena setting and flat-floored), cyberart theater, theater walking tours and other forms of site-specific theater such as performing in high-school gyms and live stream theater in which a classroom is intruded through a television screen. Respondents that had prior experience with

site-specific theater saw opportunities in aligning a new set-up, the physical distancing measures and the conceptual idea behind their performances.

> I would like to say that the technical aspect in the rehearsal process was huge, so we were actually able to attach only very little importance to the actual playing and we actually noticed that during the performances [...] in the beginning it was really about knowing your lines and getting it technically done and now it's starting to get a little more about the actual play. (Respondent 3, end stage theater, site-specific theater & live stream theater)

Additionally, they said that acquiring these new necessary digital skills was very time-intensive, interfering with the time usually spent on rehearsing — thus the moment where actors usually have bonded with their performance enough to focus more on the audience response, arrives later in the process than before the pandemic. Nonetheless, respondent 11 (cyberart theater) and respondent 3 (end stage theater, site-specific theater & live stream theater) were able to acquire these skills and look for ways to expand these skills and even teach them to other performers.

The flow theory argues that through performing just-manageable tasks, one is being challenged by reaching clear goals supported by immediate feedback (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). The respondents, however, expressed that it took an enormous amount of effort to acquire the digital skills they did not possess prior to the lockdown challenges; they were unaware of how an audience would respond to their new performance setup and therefore the acquiring of new technical skills decreased practical advantages throughout the process. There was not always a clear proximal goal supported by immediate feedback and rewards.

The end stage theater performances that were discussed, revealed a discrepancy where different numbers of performers were concerned. The respondents who performed in a team, expressed that there was a higher sense of collegiality. Obstacles such as shorter rehearsal periods and spending more time on stage positioning were accepted more easily because of the relief of being able to perform again. All of the respondents talked about a sense of happiness to having been able to perform (often comparing their own situation to that of colleagues who did not have that opportunity during this time). The two respondents who performed a monologue on an end stage (respondent 2 and respondent 9), however, expressed that it was not a very entertaining preparation process. Learning lines is more difficult to do

on your own when you are not sure if you will be able to perform what you are working for, in the case restrictions would be tightened again.

Thus, based on these findings, there seems to be a certain satisfaction when working together with other performers is part of the process, even when there was no certainty that the performances would actually be performed. This satisfactory component was not described by solo performers. In addition, challenges that were experienced as more challenging than before were met with feedback only very late in the process, which increased uncertainty.

4.1.2 During the Performance

A recurrent overall finding is that it is important to acknowledge that, in general, it is always difficult for a performer to estimate how the audience has experienced the performance. A performer can believe it was a great show when the audience would disagree, or the other way around. Respondent 5 puts it as follows:

> [S]omeone closes their eyes during the performance, after the performance you see this person and say 'you have been sleeping'. That person says 'no not at all, I have enjoyed myself, I closed my eyes and listened'. (Respondent 5, end stage theater, theater-in-the-round & live stream theater)

The performer was focused on the behavior of the audience and misinterpreted their expression. Nevertheless, all respondents say that having a direct response and feedback from an audience enhances the performance. In the most basic way, this is knowing when to wait for a minute when the audience is laughing before continuing lines.

> Sometimes they laugh really hard, other times they giggle a bit and in the worst case they don't laugh at all, and then you also know that you have to take it up a step. You don't get that with a camera. With an online performance, you have no return whatsoever, the only thing you hear after the performance is that they turn that screen around and then you see all those matchstick things of people who [imitates applause] then you hear that and that is basically everything you see and hear and get from the audience. And that is very little. (Respondent 6, live stream theater)

Respondents assume that every breath, smile and even silence from the audience influences the performer(s). In contrast, they express that they are never really able to interpret how the audience is experiencing the performance. Multiple performers expressed that no direct

feedback at all can make a performer insecure. If a performer knows that people in the audience will usually laugh after a certain joke, in different volumes each time, yet nothing happens, they start to wonder what is wrong — which they say is distracting.

The respondents who performed on an end stage in front of a dispersed and small audience experienced less feedback from the audience, which could sometimes make them insecure about how the performance was being received. In most cases, it resulted in receiving less energy from the audience. A recurrent finding is that performances often lingered around the experience of a rehearsal — resulting in the incapability to improve and change small micro-interactions with the audience, which in turn leads to focus more on the performance itself and their fellow performers. A shared point of view by the performers is that the performances which often possessed perfect technicality, lacked personal touch adjusted to the audience.

> [T]hen you notice that it almost becomes more technical, so the singing will be better technically, and less emotional, because they are not carried away by the energy of the hall. Sometimes they don't feel like they are getting something back from the audience. When contact is made with the audience, then it stays. Then a relationship is established. (Respondent 12, end stage theater, site-specific theater & live stream theater)

Some performers started experimenting more on stage because of that lingering feeling of experiencing a rehearsal, which sometimes led to situations in which a fellow performer did not know how to respond any longer. In end stage theater performances, tools were implemented to trick or remind performers of the awareness of the audience and to recreate a sense of pressure or adrenaline rush that influences the performance on stage.

> [W]e created the pressure before a performance. The stage manager calls 30-minute curtain call and 20-minute curtain call half an hour in advance, but that's a bit of fooling yourself or pumping yourself up to go to that top performance. (Respondent 12, end stage theater, site-specific theater & live stream theater)

For similar purposes, multiple respondents decided to increase the lighting in the theater hall, so they would see the audience better in order to continuously remind the performers of its presence.

Respondents who performed flat-floored theater-in-the-round, expressed that they experienced a much more personal connection with the audience. In contrast, the respondents

who performed theater-in-the-round in an arena setting (Respondent 1 and Respondent 10) expressed that how they were able to disregard any feedback of the audience, gave them more freedom. They did not have to adhere to the expectations of the audience anymore and therefore experienced more focus on playing amongst performers and — in correspondence with the performers on the proscenium stage — more freedom to experiment. Thus, a performance is indeed an interaction ritual with the audience which is sometimes experienced as oppressive. The connection with the audience is infectious, but it can also be experienced as stressful because the expectations of the audience have to be met. Therefore, some respondents experienced it as liberating no longer having to rely on this. It seemed to have made them focus more on the collectivity in which they perform in itself.

In addition, having no direct response from an audience also influences the finalization of the performance. The creation of a theater show often continues during the time it is performed. Multiple respondents claimed that there is a difference between a performance succeeding content-wise — knowing the performance is sound in itself — and a performance succeeding because of a good concentration amongst the performers and there having been a connection with the audience. Some cabaret performances are finalized just before they go into premiere, whilst performances that include an orchestra and/or acrobats have strict agreements down to every placement on the stage from the beginning (for reasons of safety, mostly). However, all of these performances go through another evolution after the premiere. The first performance is often mostly to test the content of the performance; do people like the show? Often, at the premiere, the audience consists of people of whom the performers value the opinion, which increases an adrenaline rush and the performers still have not fully bonded with the performance. After the premiere, the connection with the performance and the trust in the content grows, which leaves more space for interaction with the audience. Thus suggesting that at the beginning of a theater production, technical skills often require more attention than later in the process, when there is more space for successful IRs and flow experience.

Another recurrent finding that seems to influence the flow experience and motivation during a performance, is the sense of control of the situation and the capability to know what is going to happen and what should be done in anticipation of that. On an end stage in front of a large hall where about thirty people are scattered, the respondents express a greater sense of control over the situation than with a full audience. The audience has turned into a room full of individuals — who often seem to feel more visible in this setup — rather than one big crowd; the sheer number of faces makes it possible to make contact with each one of them.

By contrast, when performing in front of a camera that streams the performance to a group of people in another location, the feeling of control seems to decrease compared to when in front of a physical audience. During these live stream performances discussed with the participants, the audience was observable through a webcam. However, the performers cannot see and hear at every moment what is happening in the room and therefore can lose the attention of the audience if something happens in that room which they don't acknowledge; there is no longer a shared reality.

> You cannot intervene in everything [...] at one point a cat had entered a classroom. That means that for those five minutes they were totally occupied with that cat and no longer with what was shown. And we didn't realize there was a cat in that classroom, so we didn't realize that attention wasn't there either. That means that they hardly listened to what was told for those five minutes, which is very annoying. If in real life, if a cat enters a theater room, the actors will not ignore the fact that a cat ends up in the theater. (Respondent 3, end stage theater, site-specific theater & live stream theater)

In this situation, the audience consisted of a group of students in a classroom and the performers were at a different location performing live in front of a camera. They were not always able to register and respond to what was happening in the classroom which gave respondent 3 less sense of control over the situation. Additionally, there were multiple factors that could overmatch the performers' skills. For instance, if the internet connection or power supply faces problems, there is not much the performers can do about it.

During the live stream performances that were performed in front of a dispersed audience — individuals or couples watching from home — a sense of control of what was happening on stage and in front of the camera was there, however, respondents expressed that there was nothing more they could do about the connection with the audience. Audience members could be looking at their phones during the performance or leave and no one would notice. There was more sense of control on stage because there was less risk of outsiders coming in or audience members doing something unexpected, threatening the performance. However, there was less control over the experience of the audience — there was no connection with the audience at all.

In the case of the cyberart theater, the situation seems to have differed. The audience members were given more authority and probably a greater sense of control as they are able to go wherever they want within this online venue. They can meet people and choose what to

attend themselves. It is interesting to note that respondent 11 (cyberart theater) expressed that he often only knew if a show was successful after the whole series of performances had ended. This suggests that respondent 11 awards success when he reaches the desired outcome of the process. This contradicts with characteristics of the flow experience where the end product is more of an excuse for the process. This respondent did not talk extensively about control during the performance. Such an outcome is the opposite of the artists that Csikszentmihalyi observed that inspired him to research the flow theory, as those were absorbed in the process (Nakamura, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

4.1.3 After the Performance

The previous findings suggest that respondents experienced different characteristics of performing as rewarding. To understand the motives behind why they perform and the meaning behind how they perform, it is important to understand why they maintain their motivation to perform. What drives them from one performance to the next? The respondents that performed on an end stage in front of a dispersed audience often expressed that while everything comes across as less energetic with less sound and contagiousness, the applause and enjoyment of the audience was still noticeable.

> Yes, noisy. You would almost have tapes playing crowd noise […] we didn't do any of that. We have not added applause recordings. Actors were always surprised that the applause was much shorter but the intention was the same. (Respondent 12, end stage theater, site-specific theater & live stream theater)

The respondents who were interested in novel forms of theater performances before they were forced to due to current circumstances, seem to attribute less value to applause in general. Some of the respondents were even used to not having any applause at all.

It seems like most of the respondents expressed that they could rely less on audience response, resulting in them looking for feedback and satisfaction elsewhere. Some of the respondents found satisfaction through creating conceptually novel productions and others got their feedback from interplay on stage with other performers. Nevertheless, the performers that were unable to find feedback or interaction before, during and after a performance express that it was a frustrating experience.

> I also got into theaters thinking 'God I really haven't spoken to anyone tonight'. I've come in and I've gone out again and people have waved thanks from afar and that's it.

> Very unsociable, very cold, very unfamiliar with theater. [...] I didn't really like it. I found it very boring and uncomfortable. It really felt like going to work, and I've never had that. (Respondent 2, end stage theater)

Respondent 2 expressed that there was no interaction with the audience, which usually is something that adds to the extraordinariness of the performance. He performed a monologue and was unable to find feedback, interaction and satisfaction elsewhere. In contrast, other performers who said there was no interaction with the audience expressed an increased focus on acting together on stage and did not express the same frustrations.

4.2 Impression Management

The theoretical framework has revealed the importance of impression management in finding the meaning behind interactional behavior on stage. Goffmans' theories provide analytical tools such as expressive order, impression management, frontstaging vs. backstaging and saving face to help understand underlying meanings of symbols in specific interaction rituals by using a specific (theatrical) terminology to understand reasons for behavior. In the following, these analytical tools will be used to shed light on the meaning of the behavior of the performers themselves according to the findings.

4.2.1 The Experienced Performer

In the previous section, it has been established that performing a show multiple times in front of an audience results in performers having to pay less attention to technical skills. This will eventually enable the performer to bond with and feel confident about a show, resulting in more room for focus on the interaction with the audience. All of the respondents expressed that being an experienced performer, being able to remember what a specific size of audience looks like and knowing your target audience — for example, high-school students — enables them to imagine that there is an audience present which allows them to reach a certain concentration.

> [T]hat is a difference between professional performers and amateur performers. An amateur performer only starts playing the moment he smells the audience. A professional performer, at least those that I work with, are always up to play. (Respondent 12, end stage theater, site-specific theater & live stream theater)

All respondents expressed that an experienced performer is more likely to perform better without the direct feedback of an audience than inexperienced performers. Experienced performers do not tend to get startled as easily by the response from an audience, which suggests a decreased focus on the audience:

> [P]eople who freeze on a stage as a result, who effectively start to perform less because something negative happens in the audience — but I will say it again, that is not me, that is long gone. (Respondent 6, live stream theater)

Respondent 5 (end stage theater, theater-in-the-round & live stream theater) is an experienced performer and he describes the concentration that he is able to get into without an audience as follows:

> I can't explain it. I don't even know. It's a story that you can do in 20 minutes and it took me an hour and 20. I really don't know what I've said [...] it is opening something up; opening a hatch and just go — see what happens. (Respondent 5, end stage theater, theater-in-the-round & live stream theater)

In this quote from respondent 5, a situation is described in which a performer is not distracted by outside distractions such as the behavior of the audience, and is surrounded by internalized memories and standards created by previous experiences. This is how Benzecry and Collins describe an I-IR, however, in this situation, there is no focus on external interaction at all; this is falling in love alone, rather than "falling in love alone, although surrounded by others" (Benzecry & Collins, 2014, p. 311).

This comment suggests that practitioners who possess more performance expertise, experience that their flow experience depends less on external validation. Looking back at the two prerequisites for the flow experience: (1) "Perceived challenges, or opportunities for action, that stretch (neither overmatching nor underutilizing) existing skills" and (2) "[c]lear proximal goals and immediate feedback about the progress that is being made" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 240), it seems that at the beginning of a performer's career, skills such as being able to imagine an audience and to not be startled by (negative) response from the audience are overstretching their existing skills. However, what the data of this study suggests in addition to that, is that once the experience of a performer has increased, the second prerequisite — clear goals and immediate feedback — becomes less important or even unnecessary in some cases as revealed by the quote from respondent 5 above. This

seems to be contradictory to the way the respondents describe the urge to interact with an audience. It could be that they (as professionals) have an impression of their own abilities enabling them to get into a certain state of concentration, but that in practice they count on audience interaction more than they think and therefore adapt more to it than they realize.

4.2.2 The Expressive Order and Audience Expectations

In order to perform a successful ritualistic interaction, every participant should try to maintain social order and a shared understanding of symbols (Goffman, 1955). In general, distractions cannot be ignored by the performer. It is unnatural to ignore loud noises that distract the audience during a performance. Distractions remind people of the outside world, as opposed to what everyone is acting out; that reality is happening on the stage. The location of theater should become a shared reality of everybody partaking in the experience. Theater is a situation in which a shared reality is played out by the performers and maintained by the performers and the audience. This has different implications for the different situations under consideration.

All respondents — also the respondents who created online performances — expressed that recording a theater performance on an end stage and directly live streaming that, is like a poorly executed movie. Theater acting is different from film or television acting; respondent 10 (end stage theater & theater-in-the-round) described theater acting as coming across as overly affectionate when filmed. Sounds and movements are deliberately enlarged in a theater performance, but they need to be small if recorded by camera. For an online theater performance, a performance tailored specifically for this medium has to be designed, which subsequently turns the performance into a more visual and technical show. When this happens, the audience is likely to see the scenography as more mediated. However, the audience is also given more say in their experience of the situation as a whole.

When a performance on stage is recorded, there is no sense of a shared reality. Viewers tend to be passive and reminded of something happening elsewhere. By creating a performance that comes together online — something that is vanishing as soon as it is happening due to the fact it is a momentarily live performance — everyone partaking in the situation or interaction becomes both an actor and an audience member. To maintain the defining characteristics of theater — it becoming a shared reality and vanishing as soon as it is over — certain features were adapted. This was sometimes difficult to comprehend for audiences that were priorly socialized around the meaning of theater. One review of an online performance from respondent 11 (cyberart theater) was entitled: *Doesn't Live up to Physical*

Experience. Respondent 11 feels this statement is true, yet, it had never been his intention to mimic a physical experience online; as one cannot create an online experience that creates the same feeling as, for example, a physical sweaty jazz concert.

> [P]eople who could read it best, were people who had no expectations of a theater performance at all. That was a young generation [...] they were all super curious young people who were not at all concerned with the fact that this was actually theater. They just saw this as a form in itself and they could read it very well. (Respondent 11, cyberart theater)

He also explained that people who weren't socialized by the traditional idea of theater, were more open to the new performance setup and these people were able to better understand the performance. Audience members that were too much invested in a traditional understanding of theater tended to be held back by their expectations and understanding of theater.

As the results identified discordances between respondents' answers, the following section will clarify how performers influence and steer audience expectations according to their different theater performance practices. The most literal example of trying to influence the audience's expectations came from respondent 11 (cyberart theater), who created a production that, in the beginning, took place both online and offline. His theater company had already decided to tour different theaters in the Netherlands with their production when they decided to make it all come together online rather than offline. In order to facilitate both of these audiences, the production did indeed tour around different theaters allowing an audience of a maximum of 30 people to watch 'the making of'. The physical audience was informed before the performance that they were attending a 'making-of' and that the show was actually taking place online — they would not be approached as if they were the audience. In the end, respondent 11 said that the show was better once there was no more physical audience.

Respondents 3, 6 and 11 (live stream theater & cyberart theater) included an introduction directly targeting the audience members and literally tell them what they were supposed to do during the performance.

> It was actually a kind of small talk but with the main function to show that 'you are seen, it matters that you are there, I see you, we are here together'. So with that we had a bit of small chat the whole time, we explained 'look you can also press gallery view we think that's a cool function because you can see how other people are sitting there just like you, we also recommend using speaker view because then you have our

> screen on full screen. Your microphone is off for the entire show but please leave your camera on, you don't have to worry that it will become participatory theater, you can just sit back and relax where you are sitting but we just love to look you in the eye and see who we are here with in order to enter into that collective experience that later also becomes thematic'. (Respondent 11, cyberart theater)

The performers actively tried to shift conventions of theater and audience expectations. Not only the online theater performances made use of this, but also end stage performances were actively changed in order to steer the understanding and expectations of the audience. Respondent 12, who directed traditional fourth wall end stage performances, even went back on stage after every scene to interact with the audience: What did they think of the scene? and to introduce the next scene.

4.3 Entrainment

As previously established in the theoretical framework, in IRs, individuals are absorbed by their collective focus and get emotionally entrained. Different respondents shared that, in a setting in which the audience was not or very little observable to the performers, it was experienced as distracting when they were suddenly made aware of the audience's presence. During almost all of the respondents' performances, the audience was described as less present and it required more focus from the performers to interpret what an audience was trying to communicate through their behavior. The audiences were hard to read for a number of reasons; their face masks were covering their facial expressions, there was a digital filter, there was too much space in the room which made the audience too dispersed, or there was no possibility to hear (or even see) the audience during performances. Respondent 1 (theater-in-the-round), for example, performed in an alternative setting that was built specifically to meet the physical distancing measures. The stage was inspired by a peepshow — it was round and could spin. The audience was seated around the stage, each in their own little cabin, divided over two floors. Each cabin was fitted with a window that the performers could decide to open or close during the show. The performance was very non-participatory for the first hour. The windows stayed closed and the audience had to hear the performers through speakers installed in their cabins.

Respondent 1 (theater-in-the-round) expressed that whenever two audience members had entered a cabin together, instead of being seated alone they could suddenly start laughing out loud which was more distracting than laughter from the audience in the traditional setting with the audience seated collectively in front of the stage.

> We were very much in a zone anyway because you have those radio microphones and you do have feedback, so you can hear yourself and the other person speaking. But you don't see the audience. [...] I felt more in touch with my fellow actors than on a stage. It really felt like you were there alone with them, and of course, we know we are being watched. I thought that was a very nice feeling. (Respondent 1, theater-in-the-round)

This quote illustrates how the disappearance of interaction with the audience and the expectations of the audience can be experienced as a relief. In general, performers are purposefully behaving in a specific manner in order to influence the audience in a certain manner. For example, if the performance or a specific scene is very emotional, it does not mean that the performer needs to have a very emotional experience on stage. The purpose is to have the audience experience emotions. Respondent 9 (end stage theater) was able to explain this in a very understandable way:

> You notice it with singing. It is very extreme, because if I sing and I have to cry while singing then I can actually no longer sing. While when I sing beautifully, someone may cry. (Respondent 9, end stage theater)

Performers are trying to have the audience experience emotion through controlling theirs on stage. This doesn't mean that the performers do not experience emotions on stage; feeling that you are doing a good job is also an emotion. However, the respondents indicate that they should not get carried away by their own emotions on stage.

4.3.1 Bodily Entrainment

There are tricks which performers use to make the audience experience certain things in a controlled manner. In order for it to feel as if a shared reality is maintained, the operative structural conditions play a role.

> Technically, you feel collectivity when you all get the same sensory impulses, to approach it very biologically. So when you're in a room and everyone smells the same red plush […] then those are all collective sensory impulses that make you aware of where you are and also make sure you know that everyone is experiencing the same thing at the same moment. That's a process you normally don't have to think about at all. (Respondent 11, cyberart theater)

Additionally to distractions that need to be acknowledged by the performers (the people guiding this ritualistic interaction), the sensory impulses also affect the sense of shared reality. During the Live Stream performances that took place in front of individuals watching from home, they asked the audience in the introduction to put on their headphones when watching the Live Stream Performance. This is a very specific feature they try to implement to increase the collective sensory impulses, because sensory impulses that are experienced individually remind people of an individual reality.

> [W]e noticed that it was very important to ask people to turn off their phones, and not only that, but also to put on headphones because you are no longer distracted by the reality, the individual reality you have, a car that passes here, you do not hear but does distract me and also ensures that we are not in the same here and now. Not in the same concentration. (Respondent 11, cyberart theater)

An evident finding within this sub-theme is that the amount of audience members affects the rush of adrenaline and excitement of the performers. Performing for big crowds creates a certain state of exaltation, described by Respondent 6 as follows:

> [Y]ou can have a fever of 39 degrees, so to speak, and you don't feel it, you can have a broken leg, you don't feel it. You just go on stage and do your thing. (Respondent 6, Live Stream theater)

If the volume of the audience decreases, the sense of adrenaline decreases. Multiple respondents claim that this does not mean that there is no excitement, nervousness and/or adrenaline rush before performing in front of smaller audiences, yet it is less. This characteristic is described as more important than wearing face masks and other limitations according to multiple respondents. This also adds to the discrepancy where they express that their experience and skills are not so much dependent on outside validation and their need for audience response.

4.3.2 Collective Entrainment

Multiple respondents explained that a collective rhythm amongst the audience is a clear sign of an audience being really into the performance. Often, a collective silence from the audience during a performance that was really silent is more rewarding than big applause — with a performance on an end stage the audience will clap at the end no matter what.

Respondent 12 (end stage theater, site-specific theater & live stream theater) described how this normally unconscious process of synchronizing amongst individuals in a situation can be influenced deliberately:

> This often has to do with the rhythm of a performance. I always work with a heartbeat and a breathing rhythm in a performance [...] all the actors were going to breathe, inhale, exhale on the same breath. After ten minutes, fifteen minutes, we had the entire audience in that same breath [...] unconsciously, because we were trained in it, but in the final scene [...] you have to consciously seem like you are holding your breath. The entire audience was so comfortable with our breathing that they came along, they were also shocked physically. That is something where you constantly check: 'Do they go along with the rhythm of a performance? Do they relax? Do they start to rock to the music? Are they going to lean forward because they find it exciting? Do they lean back and laugh loudly?' So you really see an audience flow and you pay attention to that. (Respondent 12, end stage theater, site-specific theater & live stream theater)

This quote illustrates the normally unconscious processes that Benzecry and Collins (2014) describe as IRs that create a shared emotion and result in collective effervescence; an interaction that influences both the performers and the audience, creating a shared rhythm that feels pleasing and is unconscious because it is synchronized (Collins, 2005). However, multiple respondents, including respondent 12 (end stage theater, site-specific theater & live stream theater), described that this is less present in the current situation on an end stage where the audience seems to be made out of different individuals rather than one collective. The contagiousness is less observable and in some cases even missing completely.

> That's a really big dilemma. [...] that it almost becomes more technical, so that the singing will be better technically and less emotionally because they are not carried away by the energy of a hall. You can see that sometimes they [the performers] don't feel that something is coming back [from an audience], but once a relationship is established with the audience, it stays. (Respondent 12, end stage theater, site-specific theater & live stream theater)

This comment suggests that an online theater performance — both live stream and cyberart theater — does not differ that much from the theater performance on a proscenium stage in front of a dispersed audience. This, therefore, implies that in all of the discussed situations, it takes more effort from the performers to try and interpret the audience response, if even

possible, and in all of these situations, this shared collective rhythm amongst actors and audience is missing or at least no longer observable.

4.3.3 Emotional Entrainment

Collective Effervescence is a shared social emotion with long-lasting results such as group solidarity, the same understanding of symbols and/or sacred objects and individual emotional energy. On the prerequisite that there is physical co-presence, Durkheim claims two things are needed to reach effervescence: (1) Shared action and awareness, and (2) shared emotion. My findings suggest that a number of different approaches have been used to try and create a shared action and awareness. Some respondents would try and be present on stage whilst the audience was shown to their seats (even though this was very tiring for them in some cases), some respondents had thought of a different way of entering the theater hall altogether (i.e. as a group through the backdoor creating a special kind of bond), others tried to give the audience more authority in an online world where they could determine what to do and who to meet and others still built special settings in which audience members were forced to also look at each other during the performance.

A meaningful similarity amongst the participants, despite the different forms of theater, was besides emphasizing that the situation is a collective experience, more emphasis was placed on a personal connection with the audience. For example, the respondents who performed theater in the round had, due to measures preventing big crowds, only one circle of audience around them creating only a front row of spectators. The respondents who performed cyberart theater mentioned the exact same thing. The way in which everybody had their own screen, their own webcam and therefore the same kind of presence in the online location made it feel as if everybody was seated on the first row. Respondents expressed that having the full audience on the front row made it more personal and more intimate. Respondent 9 (end stage theater), who performed a monologue that was addressing the audience directly, enjoyed that she was able to address everyone individually but says that she would have enjoyed that even more with flat-floored theater-in-the-round. Respondent 2 (end stage theater), also performed a monologue, yet, this performance was a more classical fourth wall performance and because of the strict measurements from the theater, he was unable to connect with audience members prior to the performance by asking questions whilst they found their seat, which he usually did when performing this monologue. The lack of this personal connection and the lack of collective and contagious response from the audience created a situation in which respondent 2 was not enjoying performing and says the

performances were not a success. The shows he expressed were more successful were the ones he performed in Belgium, where the number of audience members that were allowed to be present was higher than in the Netherlands.

Many of the respondents who had performed different forms of theater confirmed that once a personal connection is established with the audience, it will stay throughout the performance. This creates a good atmosphere in which the audience feels that they are allowed to respond to what is happening on stage and the concentration of the performers is balanced between what needs to happen on stage and this connection with the audience.

Collins describes in *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2005) that a shared emotion during a ritualistic practice is what allows individuals to get submerged or entrained in the shared IR and results in emotional energy that provides group solidarity and individual emotional energy in line with Durkheim's collective effervescence. This shared emotional quality is brought about by bodily co-presence, a mutually aware focus of attention, shared emotional quality and exclusion of outside distractions.

The results of this study suggest that the collective rhythm that usually reinforces a shared emotion is replaced by the need for a personal connection with the audience. The respondents express that it sometimes takes more work at the beginning of a performance to forge a bond with the audience due to strict measures in the theater venue, the physical distance or the need to steer expectations and create some sort of collective sensory experience. However, once this bond is forged, this connection is maintained throughout the performance. Therefore, bodily co-presence seems to be connected more to the original Durkheimian model in which collectivism is in part responsible for creating feelings of exaltation. The lack of physical co-presence and collectivism influences the amount of energy that is produced amongst individuals in an IR. However, it does not prevent IRs from happening. Instead, a personal connection is formed that offers a more personal approach, creating more intimacy.

5. Conclusion

The research question which this study set out to answer is how are interaction rituals and the flow experience of theater performers influenced by physical distancing measures? The aim of this research was to inquire about the effect of physical distancing on cultural experience — specifically the theater performance — taking a sociological approach towards interactional stage behavior, in order to receive a better understanding of the importance of physical proximity for meaning-making, flow experience and generating solidarity in social groups.

Before attempting to form an answer, the historical relationship between the development of sociological constructs of solidarity and meaning-making and theater needed to be analyzed. This analysis has further emphasized the relevance of this research on the theater performance, as it was established that cultural experiences influence social groups and meaning-making in society. The theater performance can be seen as a commemorative rite in which this process is made more explicit through aesthetic reflection on social organization.

To get into the flow experience during physical distancing, some of the traditional ingredients need to be redefined. Experienced performers count on their ability to reach a level of concentration necessary for a theater performance without the need for immediate feedback from an audience. Practitioners who possess more performance experience expressed that they depend less on external validation while performing than inexperienced performers. That said, the findings suggest that the lack of immediate feedback from an audience influences them more than they express. It seems that they maintained their performance out of professionalism and every encounter with feedback and connections with the audience were seen as extraordinary rewards. Almost all respondents expressed that it took them more effort than before to interpret audience behavior and establish a relationship with the audience. They were very focused on the audience and actively steering understanding and expectations — in contrast with the flow characteristic of loss of reflective self-consciousness and the merging of action and awareness. Suggesting that the flow didn't go so smoothly after all.

Some respondents were able to reach a level of concentration that displayed the characteristics of a flow experience such as an intense focus, merging of action and awareness, loss of reflective self-consciousness, a sense of control, distortion of temporal experience and experiencing the activity as intrinsically rewarding (Benzecry & Collins, 2014). However, this was only possible in situations where the audience was not observable

to the performers at all and the fourth wall was self-evident. This was less so for the respondents who harbored artistic visions of extending the meaning of theater; who also value a theater show only when it is performed in front of an audience.

More specifically, the research has shown that because of the recent change in microsociological structures — physical distancing as a new cultural norm — the ritual of the theater performance is actively adjusted in order to be successful. The overall finding that introductions are an important tool to actively steer the situation, seems to suggest that audience expectations must be actively adjusted to perform the ritual under these new circumstances. The ritual is modified because it can only be successful if it is based on personal connection. The production of energy and intrinsic reward seems to be more dependent on having a personal interaction — either with fellow performers on stage or with the audience — and the collective ingredient from collective effervescence seems to be no longer the most important. However, even when respondents enjoyed successful IRs by establishing personal relations with fellow performers or audience members, the collective state of exaltation and sense of adrenaline was significantly lower than when performing in front of a crowd.

When performers start their performance by building a personal relationship with the audience members, the amount of performers on stage does not necessarily influence whether or not successful IRs occur. That said, what was left outside of the scope of this study, was the performance of a monologue as a digitally mediated theater experience. The findings of this research suggest that a digitally mediated theater monologue would only enable a successful IR if the performer can interact with the audience members directly throughout the performance to establish a personal connection (shared emotion). However, this might in turn prevent reaching flow experience for the performer as this study revealed that one cannot act in front of a camera and have direct contact with an audience unless the performances' location is brought together by the audience and performers online.

Recording a traditional end-stage theater performance is like a poorly executed movie because the acting seems overly affectionate and the scenery of a traditional theater stage only reminds the viewer more of where they are currently *not* a part of and what they are missing out on. Respondents described it as awkward to look at and expressed that a theater performance meant to be filmed should be adapted as such, changing the acting and increasing visual aspects and technicality.

Due to the size of this research, I was only able to conduct and analyze twelve interviews of approximately 50-60 minutes. However, the wide scope on different situations

and the focus on experiences of this inquiry afforded the analysis of the similarities and meaningful dissimilarities of different situations in which one operative structural condition had changed. The focus of this study lays on what different forms of theater, despite their differences, have in common and how they deal differently with a corresponding challenge. Therefore, I suspect that a larger sample will reveal very similar results.

More broadly, research is needed to see if these implications do indeed offer tools for other cultural experiences. The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice. Traditional literary theater plays that maintain the fourth wall concept throughout the performance, are less likely to enable IRs and reward the performer, unless there are multiple performers on stage that can completely zone out and forget about the audience. However, only for performances that are open to improvisation and experimentation from the performers. A form of theater that seems more easily applicable in this current social situation is flat-floored theater-in-the-round that, from the beginning, tries to personally connect with people in the audience. In this situation, the personal connection can make up for the loss of energy usually generated by the collective experience. However, the results reveal that this is not the case in situations where the audience is not only physically distanced but also present in small numbers for theater forms that need a lot of contagiousness amongst an audience, such as comedy. These performances thrive more on an a sense of adrenaline and when audiences don't get swept away by their neighbors, the performer(s) is unable to fill all that open space.

Overall, this study has revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting physical distancing measures have a significant influence on theater performances. More specifically, the measures affect the occurrence of the flow experience and favor a personal approach towards the audience over a collective approach, which is expected when you take into account that smaller collectives provide less collective energy. Even though several respondents saw the challenge in having to come up with new and inventive ways to perform, others only did so because there was no other option. All of them, however, cannot wait to perform in front of (large) crowds again, where the collective energy can take their performance to the next level. Even though theaters are once again opening back up, the physical distanced situation during the height of the pandemic has allowed us a greater understanding of interaction rituals on a theater stage.

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Appendix A

Topic guide research theater performances influenced by physical distancing

First of all, thank you for taking part in this interview. I am researching the connection between actors and audiences at a time of physical distancing - and how this is reflected on the stage. In this interview, I will mainly ask you about your experience of performing at a time of physical distancing. As indicated earlier, the interview will be recorded and then transcribed anonymously. The arrangement of the performances, such as the context of the audience and the actors, will have to be explained meaning that you can still be traced from my research. Therefore, I cannot guarantee your anonymity completely. Do you understand and agree?

Okay, let's get started, I estimate that the interview will last 50-60 minutes but know that you can decide to opt-out of the interview at any time. You may also request that your data be deleted and that your answers are not taken into account in the analysis. The interview consists of two parts, first, we discuss the side of the artists, and then we discuss the performances in relation to the audience. I'll start with some general questions.

Topic	Leading Questions
General Background Information	- How long have you been a performer? - What type of performances did you do before the pandemic? Are these similar to your more recent performances? Have you ever performed in front of a camera without an audience present? Such as on television or in movies? - How did you experience the transition from your regular work, to intelligent lockdown and finally all the theaters closed? How did you experience this time? (Pay attention to their attitude, did they have to overcome something?) - What performances have you done since last year March? And can you explain how the physical distancing measures were involved in the setup of the performance? *The positioning of the audience but also the distance between the actors, plastic screens between actors?*

experience of and amongst performers	- Could you describe the contact between the performers on stage/during the performance? - Is that different from before? With the more traditional form of theater? - Did any signalling take place amongst the performers on stage? *Communication amongst performers not meant for the audience.* - What happened backstage during the performance? If there was a backstage. - Did performers try to motivate each other before or during the performance? - Is that defferent from before? With a more traditional form of theater? - Has the physical distance amongst the performers - if this was the case - influences the play? - Have you experienced any distractions during the performance? - Did you notice any evolutions as a performance sequence progressed? *For example that you started to like certain things more, or not? Normally you replay the performance for a different audience more often. Did that stay the same?*
	Then it's time to move on to part two of the interview. The connection with the audience.
Interacting with the audience	- Did you interact with the audience and was that different from before? - Did the interaction with the audience influence the play? And if so, how? - Could you describe the behavior of the audience? - Do you see any differences with a performance in a classical arrangement and in what way? Can you explain that? - Did you take that into account? More or less than in a traditional performance? - During the performance, did you ever feel that the audience was distracted by something? - Were there any reviews from the audience afterwards? And if so, what were they? - Do you think the performance was received the way it was intended to? And if so, how? - Do you think the way in which the audience viewed the performance had any impact on the way you played?